

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 1050

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PGOV, IT, VT
SUBJECT: VATICAN VIEWS ON CURRENT ITALIAN POLITICAL SCENE

1. I HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO MEET VATICAN FOREIGN MINISTER
ARCHBISHOP CASAROLI JANUARY 17 AT LUNCHEON ARRANGED BY SARROS
AND WE DISCUSSED VARIOUS SUBJECTS INCLUDING THE CURRENT ITALIAN
POLITICAL SITUATION, THE RECENT DAYAN VISIT TO THE VATICAN AND
HIS FORTHCOMING TRIP TO THE U.S. (JANUARY 22-28).

2. REGARDING THE CURRENT ITALIAN POLITICAL SCENE, CASAROLI
OBSERVED THAT OUR RECENT STATEMENTS HAD THE DESIRABLE EFFECT
OF SETTING RECORD STRAIGHT THAT U.S. WAS NOT INDIFFERENT TO
POLITICAL COURSE OF ITS EUROPEAN ALLIES AND ESPECIALLY ITALY.
HE APPROVED OF STATEMENTS SAYING THAT ITALIAN JOURNALISTS DO
NOT APPLY AMERICAN JOURNALISTIC STANDARDS IN ANALYZING VIEW POINTS
AND SOMETIMES BY USING PHRASES OUT OF CONTEXT, PRODUCE DISTORTIONS
WHICH NEED CLARIFICATION AND CORRECTION. HE FURTHER NOTED THAT
PRESS AND POLITICAL COMMENTS WERE PREDICTIBLE. THE PCI, HE SAID,
HAD PARTICULAR REASON TO BE CRITICAL OF THE U.S. BECAUSE
IT "SCENTED" THE OPPORTUNITY OF GETTING INTO THE "FORMAL"
GOVERNMENT PROCESS AND WAS OBVIOUSLY DISAPPOINTED THAT
THIS DID NOT MATERIALIZE.

3. TO REPLY TO MY QUESTION REGARDING THE TIMING OF THE
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CRISIS, CASAROLI OBSERVED THAT HE HAD BEEN PUZZLED BY THE
TIME CHOSE FOR THE CRISIS AND THOUGHT THAT BERLINGUER'S
HAND MAY HAVE BEEN FORCED BY THE SOVIET UNION ACTING THROUGH
BERLINGUER'S ENEMIES WITHIN THE PARTY ITSELF.

4. WITH REGARD TO THE FUTURE, CASAROLI SAID THAT IT WAS
DIFFICULT TO PREDICT WHAT POLITICAL FORMULA AMONG SEVERAL

WOULD BE CHOSEN FOR RESOLVING CURRENT GOVERNMENTAL CRISIS BUT OBSERVED THAT DC APPEARED DETERMINED TO SEEK SOLUTION THROUGH AN UPDATED PROGRAMMATIC ACCORD. HE THOUGHT THAT NEW ELECTIONS WERE NOT LIKELY TO CLARIFY THE SITUATION AND WOULD HAVE LONG-TERM BAD EFFECT ON ITALIAN POLITICAL PROCESS BECAUSE THEY COULD RESULT IN THE ELIMINATION OR FUTHER DIMINUTION OF THE SMALL DEMOCRATIC PARTIES WHICH NOW PROVIDED A CUSHION BETWEEN THE DC AND THE PCI. IN THE LATTER CONNECTION HE LAMENTED THAT ITALY DID NOT HAVE A STRONG SOCIALIST PARTY, OBSERVING THAT THE PSI, IN ADDITION TO BEING ELECTORALLY WEAK, IS SO HOPELESSLY DIVIDED INTERNALLY THAT IT WOULD NOT PLAY A STABILIZING ROLE IN ITALIAN POLITICS.

5. COMMENT: I WAS IMPRESSED WITH CASAROLI'S STATEMENT OF SUPPORT OF OUR CURRENT LINE IN ITALY. GIVEN HIS REPUTATION AS AN OPPONENT OF A VATICAN HARD LINE AGAINST THE PCI (SEE ROME 786), I HAD NOT EXPECTED CASAROLI TO TAKE SUCH AN UNEQUIVOCAL POSITION. I ASSUME, THEREFORE, THAT HE IS REFLECTING THE VATICAN POSITION WHICH WAS REPORTED IN ROME 429. CASAROLI IMPRESSED ME AS A THOUGHTFUL PERSON WHO IS DEEPLY WORRIED ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES FOR ITALY IF THE PCI WERE TO TURN ITS BACK ON THE BERLINGUER LINE. HE BELIEVES THAT THE PCI WAS SUBJECT TO THE SAME HISTORICAL CHANGES AND EVOLUTION AS ALL POLITICAL MOVEMENTS AND IN THIS HE DISAGREED WITH DR. KISSINGER'S ANALYSIS OF EUROCOMMUNISM. HOWEVER, HE IS QUICK TO POINT OUT THAT THIS COULD TAKE A LONG TIME
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AND THAT TO "GAIN TIME" FOR THIS EVOLUTION IT WAS NECESSARY TO HAVE IN PLACE STRONG DEMOCRATIC PARTIES TO CONTEST ITS HEGEMONY AND TO INDUCE IT TO CHANGE IN DEMOCRATIC DIRECTIONS.
GARDNER

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